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before
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Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights & International Operations
“Angola’s Long Delayed Elections”
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INTRODUCTION

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to join you today to discuss Angola and its election prospects. I am pleased to join USAID Deputy Assistant Administrator Dr. Paul Bonicelli in this exchange. Angola is a country with vast natural resources and great potential for economic development and prosperity. Now, almost four years after the end of a devastating civil war spanning nearly three decades, Angola is beginning to rebuild its tattered infrastructure and institutions.

Democracy is emerging in Angola, which is facing the challenges of building democratic institutions after a 27-year civil war. The country’s first elections held in 1992 ended in violence when UNITA’s Jonas Savimbi rejected the results of the first round of the presidential election and returned to war. The country’s president, Jose Eduardo dos Santos, has been in power since the death in 1979 of Angola’s first president, Agostinho Neto. Since the 1992 elections were not completed, dos Santos was never technically elected. The end of Angola’s civil war in 2002, following the death of Jonas Savimbi, opened the door to lasting peace, and renewed hopes of democratic revitalization. President dos Santos is today the leader of a stable and potentially prosperous country, but Angola has a long road ahead as it works to address fundamental issues of democratization and corruption.

U.S. foreign policy priorities in Angola are shifting from emergency humanitarian needs to supporting Angola’s development and reconstruction. Our goals are to strengthen democracy and governance, promote respect for human rights, support economic growth and development, improve health, and increase regional security. Angola has been at peace for almost four years. The peace must be consolidated through free and fair elections, increased investment on infrastructure, reduced corruption, and improved social programs that benefit all Angolan people. A democratic and economically progressive Angola would have a positive impact on the continent, and contribute to regional stability. With petroleum reserves yielding around 1.4 million barrels of oil per day, a rapidly decreasing inflation rate, and the highest economic growth rate in the world at nearly 20%, a democratic and economically progressive Angola will also have resounding effects in ensuring a strong business environment and serving as a source of stability in the global energy market. A healthy and stable Angolan

economy will also energize the economies of the central and southern African region.

During my March 2006 visit to Angola, I emphasized how critically important elections are not only to building a strong democracy but also to the creation of a secure and stable business environment attractive to investors. President Bush noted at a recent White House event honoring four African recipients of the prestigious Democracy Award from the National Endowment for Democracy that "people everywhere desire to be free... freedom does not just belong to American citizens. Freedom belongs to everybody." The President's comments resonate for Angolans, too.

ELECTION PROSPECTS

While there remains uncertainty regarding the date of elections, the Government of Angola continues to take important steps to prepare for the process. In 2005, Angola passed electoral laws establishing the framework for elections. The laws were the result of a consultative process involving civil society as well as all political parties. An independent National Election Commission (NEC), consisting of 11 members, was created to oversee the election process, including voter registration. Although technical work and preparations for voter registration are underway, it appears unlikely that elections will be held in 2006. President dos Santos in his New Year's address in January 2006 urged the country to increase the pace of infrastructure improvements and emphasized that the risk of landmines must be addressed in order to ensure that voters have safe access to polling places. He called for elections to be held no later than 2007.

The United States Government has consistently maintained the importance of holding parliamentary and presidential elections in a timely manner. We have contributed to strengthening democracy by providing training to all political parties and to civil society. My colleague from USAID, Dr. Bonicelli, will provide more details on this. Because of the 1992 election experience, some Angolans, especially those in the provinces, associate elections with violence and war. Our work is helping educate the population on elections and on conflict resolution through dialogue. We have helped support marginalized elements to discover their voice and participate effectively in the election preparation process. We have also maintained that independent media is crucial to free and fair elections. The USG has supported media freedom through funding and technical training with positive results. The Press Law passed this year provides the initial framework for the licensing of independent radio stations throughout the country to complement the energetic discussion of political issues by independent radio stations now reaching one-third of the population residing in Luanda and Bengo provinces.

We have consistently called for democratic elections in Angola, but the decision to move toward freedom and democracy lies with the Government and

the people of Angola. As Assistant Secretary Frazer stated earlier this year, "The United States will support democratic movements in Africa."

OTHER ISSUES

Other issues critical to solidifying a democratic and prosperous Angola include economic reform and good governance, and improved health care. There are signs of progress on anti-corruption and transparency efforts. We welcome the increasingly transparent publishing of oil revenues and budgets, and are encouraged by Angola's movement toward ratification of the United Nations and African Union anticorruption conventions. The International Monetary Fund and the World Bank have noted positive steps by the Angolan government to eliminate off-budget expenditures and the international community witnessed a recent oil concession round praised for its unprecedented openness and transparency. The Angolan government has authorized the publication of IMF and World Bank reports on public websites and has itself published excerpts of the reports in government-controlled media. Such steps help make the government more directly accountable to the public.

The U.S. Government is providing technical assistance to help the Angolan Government staff and train a Fiscal Programming Unit, which strengthens the government's economic planning and fiscal programming capacity. This capacity is particularly important in a country such as Angola, where authorities must develop a plan to use volatile short-term oil gains in support of long-term poverty reduction objectives. We are encouraged by the Angolan Government's recent indication that it is taking steps to join the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI), which would send a positive signal to the Angolan public that the government is committed to transparency. We also encourage investor nations, including China, now Angola's biggest oil export market, to promote transparency in dealings with Angola. We have promoted the benefits of economic diversification to help build employment in non-oil sectors, including agriculture, and have encouraged Angola to take greater advantage of the African Growth and Opportunity Act and increase its exports to the United States. We also welcome institutional support to improve the ability of the provincial and municipal governments to monitor expenditures.

American oil companies have actively participated in building and developing the Angolan economy by procuring more goods and services from local companies and supporting local entrepreneurs through a variety of capacity-building initiatives, strengthening Angola's private sector and forming productive linkages between the oil industry and the rest of Angola's economy. Angolan officials have called for greatly increased foreign and domestic investment to diversify its economy and provide additional jobs and prosperity for people throughout the country. Currently at least thirty US companies and 6000 US citizens operate and work in Angola. The overwhelming majority of these employees are associated with the oil sector. An improved business environment will attract further investment. The government has taken positive

steps by passing an Investment Law, which provides incentives for private investment and setting up a “One-Stop Shop” to streamline business registration procedures.

Roughly 40% of Angolan oil comes from the Angolan enclave of Cabinda, separated from the rest of the country by the Congo River and a narrow strip of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Since Angola’s independence in 1975 from Portugal, Cabinda has been the site of an armed conflict challenging the Angolan government’s control over the province. Today, the Angolan Government and the Cabinda Forum for Dialogue are nearing a peace settlement, which will reinforce stability in the country and in the region. The United States supports this pursuit of peace and hopes that the agreement will encourage the full participation of voters in Cabinda in the election process.

Health concerns are, of course, also of grave importance in Angola. Though HIV/AIDS is not yet at epidemic levels in Angola, all of the indicators that preceded the crisis in other parts of sub-Saharan Africa are present. The population is currently just emerging from a cholera epidemic that has affected an estimated 45,000 people, killing more than two thousand Angolans. The Angolan Government needs to invest more of its own resources to address these health crises to ensure that all Angolans prosper as a result of the country’s growing wealth. Additionally, malaria continues to plague the population as the primary killer. We are helping to fight malaria under the President’s Malaria Initiative. This week an innovative vaccination program sponsored by the Government of Angola and supported by USAID, CDC, Exxon-Mobil, the American Red Cross, UNICEF, WHO, Rotary International, CORE, and our international partners, the Governments of Norway, Great Britain, Canada and Japan, will be launched that will protect more than 3 million children against polio, measles, malaria, vitamin A deficiency and parasites.

THE WAY FORWARD

The United States will continue to encourage elections and democracy in Angola, as well as economic reform and transparency. Both nations have much to gain from a lasting bilateral relationship in terms of peace and prosperity. We will continue to assist Angola to reach its potential and look forward to working with the Angolan government in building a more democratic, transparent and prosperous society, which will also have a positive impact on the region generally.